

Initial study of lifestyles, consumption patterns, sustainable development and gender:

Do women leave a smaller ecological footprint than men?

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Author: Gerd Johnsson-Latham, Swedish Ministry of Sustainable Development, April 2006.

Summary

Sustainable consumption and production patterns and lifestyles have been on the international agenda ever since the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio. This was confirmed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation in 2002, when a 10-year programme of work was announced as part of the Marrakesh process. The agenda covers a number of important aspects, primarily relating to production, but very little attention has been given to the question of how gender affects the way individuals act in terms of sustainable consumption and 'lifestyle'.

An assumption in this paper is that women leave a smaller 'ecological footprint' than men, for a variety of reasons discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, there are very few studies on the links between gender, lifestyle, consumption and sustainable development. While Sweden does have statistics and studies showing the differences between the sexes as regards consumption of goods and services, there are almost no studies or research on how women's and men's differing tasks both at home and at the workplace give rise to different consumption patterns and what we call 'lifestyles'. There would seem to be still less analysis of how differing consumption patterns reflect women's and men's values and lifestyles – and whether one pattern or the other is economically, socially or environmentally sustainable.

At the international level, the EU, the UN, the World Bank and the research community have produced extensive studies and scientific data concerning the differences in women's and men's *time-use and work duties*, both in the home (i.e. the 'care economy') and in the market where work and services are paid for. Studies of women's economic situations and duties, however, are rarely conducted in terms of 'consumption', 'lifestyle' and sustainability. We do need to *make this invisible knowledge visible to be able to identify strategic and concrete action* that hopefully can improve the lives of millions of women who now live under most unsustainable conditions.

Comments and suggestions in relation to the text could be forwarded to the author, gerd.johnsson-latham@sustainable.ministry.se.

Introduction and aims

This memorandum has been produced at the Ministry of Sustainable Development and aims to provide a brief review of what is known about gender, lifestyles and consumption patterns, from a Swedish horizon but also, though more briefly at this stage, in an international perspective. The paper examines the question of what more we need to know about the links between gender, consumption and sustainable lifestyles. A further aim in this paper, and to an even greater extent in an in-depth due later, and even more in a in-depth study to follow is to show how women's priorities, 'lifestyles' and consumption are to a considerable extent a function of the greater responsibility they take for unpaid work in the home all over the world – and to analyse whether a less resource-consuming type of welfare than the present one might develop if women were to exercise more influence. The question would then be whether a type of welfare in which gender equality and women's rights and voices were given greater attention would leave a smaller ecological footprint than the present one. And also whether such a model would provide better access to goods and services adapted to the needs of *both* women and men, and children and the elderly – as claimed, for instance, by Swedish environmental economist Stefan Edman¹ and Indian feminist ecologists such as Vandana Shiva.²

A further analysis of these issues along with the issues discussed in this paper represents a contribution to the work under way on sustainable consumption and production patterns, and to the Marrakesh process and its third meeting of experts in Stockholm in 2007. The analysis also marks a contribution to present efforts to give women the same possibility as men of influencing decisions, agendas and thus resource allocation – and can thus help achieve the Swedish Government's overall objective of ensuring that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives.³

Some definitions

Sustainable development

The Brundtland Report of 1987 defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. This clearly expresses what is fair and how it is imperative to act in a responsible manner so that the fundamental needs of all can be met today, worldwide and far into the future. Sustainable development and the fight against

¹ Swedish Government Bill 2004: 119

² Shiva

³ Swedish Government Bill 2006: 155.

poverty may thus be viewed as two sides of the same coin, where sustainable development has both a ‘horizontal’ dimension addressing solidarity and poverty reduction *today* throughout the world – and a ‘vertical’ dimension in the form of solidarity with future generations.

Consumption

Consumption is defined here as both public and private consumption of goods and services – including consumption and production in the home. The abbreviation SCP denotes Sustainable Consumption and Production.

This study will not, however, consider the extensive worldwide *illegal* consumption and production of drugs, the sex trade, gambling, etc, which might have been encompassed by an analysis of sustainable consumption and production patterns and where distinct gender-specific patterns are evident.

Production, reproduction and the ‘care economy’

In this paper, the English terms ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ are not used separately. Instead, all work is regarded as productive, whether it concerns unpaid work in the home (‘the care economy’) or paid work in the open labour market. This approach broadens the scope of terms such as ‘economy’, ‘production’ and ‘resources’ in the ‘classic’ economic discourse that is reflected in such standard macro-economic works as the Swedish *Vår Ekonomi* (‘Our Economy’) by Klas Eklund (2006) – a book that only deals with goods and services in the open market.⁴ This ignores the unpaid work that is performed primarily by women throughout the world and which meets fundamental but macroeconomically ‘invisible’ human needs such as care of children and the elderly, food provision, caring for the sick, and so forth. The broader definition applied here embraces the whole spectrum, including the ‘care economy’ and the work on which ‘Step 2’ is based where primarily men engage in the production of goods and services *outside the family*, in the open market.

Welfare

The UN, the World Bank and the research literature offer many different definitions of welfare: GDP/capita, the Human Development Index, the Gender Development Index, and so on. This shows that the term can be defined both in a narrow economic perspective and in a broader perspective embracing human security, freedom and the like.

“The Economist: The World in Figures” (2006) applies six different definitions of welfare:

⁴ Eklund

- The Quality of Life Index, where Geneva with 39 indicators is ranked first and Baghdad last.
- Living Standards, measured in GDP/capita, where Luxembourg takes first place and Burundi last.
- The Human Development Index, where Norway ranks first and Sweden second, and Sierra Leone comes last.
- The Gender-Related Development Index, where Norway once again takes first place and Sweden second.
- The Highest Quality of Life, weighted by 9 factors, including economy, life expectancy, political stability, family and community life, climate, political freedom and gender equality. Here, the OECD countries dominate, with Ireland in first place and Sweden fifth.
- The Environmental Sustainability Index, with Finland first, Norway second, Uruguay 3rd and Sweden 4th.

Gender

A social construct that ascribes different qualities and rights to women and men regardless of individual competence or wishes. These social norms and values often mean that women globally perform (the bulk of) work without pay in the home while men are given these goods and services as free assets, yet *men* are regarded both as family providers and as family heads. Gender and gender power are reflected at all levels of society, where women are often responsible for health and social care provision – both at home and at the workplace – while men are able to use their greater share of leisure time to pursue careers/work and to participate in decision-making at all levels of public life. The ‘gender differences’ mentioned in this paper refer to differences resulting not from biological attributes or preferences but from *gender constructs as defined above*.

Source material

This paper is based on information from Statistics Sweden, which has long been the world leader in gender disaggregated statistics, and on data and analyses presented in the Long-Term Planning Commission report from the Swedish Ministry of Finance (LU 2003) and on Government Bill 2004:119, “Hållbara laster: Konsumtion för en ljusare framtid” and “Tänk om – en handlingsplan för hållbar konsumtion”, a written communication (Skr 2005/06:107) from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs, both focusing on sustainable consumption. It is also based on reports from the UN, the EU, the OECD and the World Watch Institute, and on research reports, etc, as reflected in the list of references in Annex 2.

Policy statements

Sweden has issued a number of key policy statements concerning both SD (sustainable development) and SCP (sustainable consumption and

production), international solidarity, poverty reduction and gender equality:

Prime Minister Göran Persson, introducing the Swedish national report at Johannesburg 2002:

“To pursue a policy of sustainable development is to help create a situation conducive to better living conditions and a better quality of life for all, not just for a few ... We must also dare to be innovative in our thinking, to seek new solutions, not least with regard to the way we produce and consume.”⁵

The overall objective proposed in the recent Swedish Government bill on gender equality is that women and men should have the same chance to shape society and their own lives. Proposed subgoals are an even distribution of power and influence, economic equality between the sexes, a fair distribution of unpaid care and service in the home, and an end to male violence against women.⁶

The Swedish Government Communication 2004/5: 4, Shared Responsibility: Sweden’s Policy for Global Development, outlines the Government’s efforts to move towards a coherent global development policy. The overall objective – to contribute to equitable and sustainable global development – is to apply to all policy areas. At the very beginning, the document emphasises the importance of creating “a safe and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable world free from poverty and powerlessness”.⁷

Some basic issues to address

- Consumption patterns and lifestyles are crucial factors in the change process that will be required in the search for sustainable development.
- One of the most profound challenges facing SD is the need to reduce unsustainable consumption, including luxury consumption, while at the same time boosting *unacceptably low consumption* among poor people, in order to achieve the UN’s Millennium Development Goals.
- Statistics throughout the world show that men earn more than women and that most of the best-paid people are men working in business, sport or the entertainment industry. In Sweden, where gender equality has progressed further than in most countries, men earn more than women

⁵ Sweden’s report to the Johannesburg World Summit 2002: ”Från Vision till handling: Sveriges nationalrapport till Johannesburg 2002

⁶ Swedish Government Bill: Makt att forma samhället och sitt eget liv - nya mål i jämställdhetspolitiken, Näringsdepartementet, Prop. 2005/06:155

⁷ Swedish Government Communication: Sveriges politik för global utveckling, Skr 2004/05:4)

in all income groups, according to the 2003 report of the Long-Term Planning Commission (Ministry of Finance).⁸

– As the World Bank has shown, gender gaps are widest in the poorest families, where resources are not divided equally among family members but in accordance with the power and influence of the individual.⁹ Studies in Latin America and Asia show that many men spend a great deal (1/3–1/2) of their earnings on themselves before distributing what remains among their families.¹⁰

– Women throughout the world are experiencing severe ‘time-poverty’ in relation to men. The World Bank study *Voices of the Poor* shows that women often work for an average of 16 hours a day compared with 8 hours a day for men – who thus have a significant welfare advantage over women.¹¹ Both time-poverty and generous access to leisure time tend to be decisive factors in what we call ‘lifestyles’ and whether or not people can actually choose what they consume.

– What is sometimes referred to as women’s consumption of household services is often something that women consume as ‘representatives’ of the family as a whole.

– Women often prefer public services to private consumption as this tends to make their own unpaid work in the home more bearable.¹²

– In their consumption, women are more likely than men to give priority to the needs and interests of the whole family.¹³

– Women place greater emphasis than men on ethical aspects in their consumer choices, and give priority to aspects such as child labour and environmental labelling.¹⁴

– Swedish Statistics indicate that the group that gives more attention to eco-labelling and “green procurement” in Sweden are the some of the poorer in society: single mothers.

– Everywhere, restricted choice of lifestyle is a function of women’s and men’s differing economic opportunities, age and ethnicity, but also differing rights, e.g. as regards sexual and reproductive health and rights, right of inheritance, ownership, freedom, and power over decision-making, etc.¹⁵

Focus on sustainable development and lifestyles

In the debate on sustainable development, sustainable consumption has attracted growing attention, not least as a result of Swedish initiatives. At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in

⁸ The 2003 report of the Long-Term Planning Commission (Ministry of Finance)

⁹ World Bank, “Engendering Development”

¹⁰ Johnsson-Latham, (referring to studies of Sylvia Chant, LSE and others)

¹¹ *Voices of the Poor*

¹² The 2003 report of the Long-Term Planning Commission (Ministry of Finance)

¹³ *Ibid.* and *Voices of the Poor*

¹⁴ Nyberg and Stø

¹⁵ Johnsson-Latham

1992, the SCP objective was established in Agenda 21, for example, while the UN World Summit in Johannesburg 2002 led to the launching of a 10-year framework of programmes dealing with these issues. A basic principle here, as in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, was that the rich had a particular responsibility for SCP – and that the polluter pays.

Sweden has been at the forefront of the Marrakesh process, under which a number of working groups have been set up to intensify work on promoting sustainable consumption and production. Sweden's environment ambassador, Viveka Bohn, is co-chair in the overall process and Sweden heads the framework group addressing the question of how lifestyles affect consumption and production patterns. This group also includes Argentina, Senegal, the UK and an NGO, Consumers International. Also, in 2007 Sweden will be hosting the UN's third international meeting of experts on sustainable consumption and production.

In addition, Sweden has long been a prime mover at both national and international level in efforts to achieve equality between the sexes and in the promotion of women's rights, as well as on issues relating to the environment and to the broader concept of sustainable development. Sweden has clearly emphasised that gender equality and the strengthening of women's rights are both a part of the sustainability agenda. Accordingly, Sweden has consistently stressed the need to guarantee women their right to land, their right to their own bodies, their sexual and reproductive health and rights, their right to economic equality with men, and their right to participate in all SD-related decision-making on the same terms as men.

The discussions that have taken place on SCP, even in the Marrakesh process, have often failed to address the question of how gender affects people's consumption and production.¹⁶ Early in the Marrakesh process, however, the UNEP Governing Council decided to mainstream a gender perspective into all further work.

Although the World Watch Institute devoted its entire 2004 annual report to consumer issues, social gender is not mentioned as a factor in lifestyles and consumer choices.¹⁷

The same applies to the critical Norwegian report on the Marrakesh process by Fuchs and Lorek (2005), which fails to mention gender as a factor affecting people's consumption.¹⁸

¹⁶ "Making the Marrakesh process work", discussion paper re Costa Rica, Sept 2005

¹⁷ World Watch Institute

¹⁸ Fuchs and Lorek

Nowadays, however, there is an increasing range of statistics and studies in Sweden – and to some extent at the international level as well – showing how in comparable economic groups gender affects people's preferences, lifestyles and consumption patterns. This in turn sheds light on how female and male consumption – in comparable groups – affects the environment and the distribution of resources.

There is also a Norwegian report by Nyberg and Sto detailing an international survey of attitudes and references concerning consumption, including SC. It finds that women make more ethical consumer choices, are more considerate of group interests and shop more sustainable.

Some conceptual structures and models illustrating gender-specific, socially constructed differences

Possibly, the greatest problem with women and gender aspects remaining unnoticed in most discussions may be the fact that discussions on “economy”, “environment” etc as defined in the current dominating schools only focus at the macro-levels and very seldom pays attention to human beings. As pointed out by Eva Nauckhoff in her study included in Johnsson-Latham's “Power and privileges”¹⁹ there is often focus on “poverty” - but on “poverty without poor”. Furthermore, in most analysis on the “economy”, sustainability etc the passive voice is used and action are often described in terms of “war broke out”, “investments fell”, oil prices increased” etc. Thus, there is a tendency not to mention who is causing what – and for what purposes. This adds a strong dimension of anonymity and inevitability to processes and often obscures the fact that there may be conflicting interests between actors, including between women and men and or on gender basis – and that there may be alternatives routes for action.

In addition to the problems in term of “schools of thought” mentioned above, in everyday references to the economy and to the distribution of resources and consumption – in keeping with a scientific tradition established by male icons – no mention is made of all the unpaid production and consumption of goods and services in the home for which women the world over are primarily responsible²⁰ This way of restricting discussion of ‘the economy’ is a form of gender blindness that recurs in all areas of society, in all setting of agendas and in all distribution of resources. This constitutes a ‘privilege of problem formulation’ whereby men throughout the world define the male – as opposed to the female – as the ‘main provider, family head and agent of change’. Thus defined, men are often said to be representing the interests of *all* – but never in terms of their *biological gender*. Women, however, are defined in gender terms, in their ‘reproductive roles’, and are said to

¹⁹ Johnsson-Latham

²⁰ Cf Eklund

have ‘special needs’ – despite the fact that they are more likely than men to provide for the family’s basic requirements through their unpaid work and have increasingly become the main providers all over the world²¹. Similarly, women are described as ‘vulnerable’, without any discussion of how gender discrimination may have *made* them vulnerable.²² The growing attention being paid to ‘gender budgeting’, however, means that women’s work in the home is increasingly being seen as a relevant factor.²³

A further consequence of the ‘privilege of problem formulation’ is that a number of issues which are felt to be critical of men – such as male violence and how such violence is linked to perceptions of male roles, lifestyles and superiority – are absent from the agenda, even in discussions on human security.²⁴ Applying a gender perspective, therefore, means not only discussing the definition of men as the ‘representatives of all’ but also showing them to be representatives of men’s collective interests as males.

It is also important to note that current definitions of sustainable development/poverty are only to be found in the left-hand column below:

hunger, ill-health
lack of income
insecurity, vulnerability

The following adds *gender-related* structural differences:

ill-health	refers to gender-related ill-health
lack of income	problematizes women’s lack of earnings
hunger	notes that women often eat last and worst
insecurity, vulnerability	violence against women and discrimination

It is also important to throw light on the way the sustainability and gender discourse focuses on two different aspects – which according to the picture below partially overlap.²⁵

²¹ Castells

²² Johnsson-Latham

²³ Elson

²⁴ UN GS Report 2004 on “Our Common Security”

²⁵ Johnsson-Latham



Poverty eradication and sustainable development

Combating gender discrimination

focus on “environment”, “economy”	focus on all dimensions of women’s subordination, time-poverty, and <i>all</i> economic activities – paid and unpaid
macro-level: <i>poverty</i> but no “poor”; the “environment”, “ecosystems”: rather than people	people-oriented
“passive voice”/anonymity	defines who is causing what
poor = gender neutral, average ‘women’s needs’ (but not men’s)	illustrates gender power, reveals men’s (own) interests
defines women as vulnerable	views women as strong
women need ‘special’ measures	emphasises non-discrimination
criteria: quantifiable, 1 dollar per day	broad spectrum of indicators: violence, HR, exclusion, SRHR
much research	marginalised
knowledge, analysis, resources, prestige, tone setters for major actors (UN, WB, EU)	few resources, little prestige, very little influence

The differing *content* in these two approaches and the fact that the overall discourse focuses on *abstractions and macro-levels where people are invisible* means that an agenda is established before the differing impact on women and men has been considered, i.e. *without any impact assessment being made from a gender power perspective*. In most cases, this means that allocated resources in the form of appropriations, staff and research, etc, fail to reach women to the same extent as men, as women – especially poor women – have greater difficulty than men in the same economic groups as a result of sexual violence, vulnerability, exclusion and lack of influence, including a lack of right to their own bodies.

Sweden's contribution

In light of the above reference to gender blindness when considering sustainable consumption and production patterns and lifestyles, Sweden wishes to contribute to the work in hand by drawing attention to:

- a) gender-specific differences in relation to sustainable consumption and lifestyles, and the extent to which they have an adverse effect on women in the form of less resources and influence, regardless of the individual's competence and wishes, in Sweden and globally, within the family, in local communities and at national level.
- b) the causes of gender-conditioned differences, including:
 - employment, paid and unpaid work, economic assets, time-poverty versus leisure time
 - the possibility of making 'lifestyles' choices, bearing in mind gender role stereotyping and 'rights' associated with gender.
- c) Some examples of unsustainable consumption:
 - i) unsustainably high consumption by global standards among rich men, e.g. in terms of transport/mobility
 - ii) unsustainably low consumption among poor women, in terms of *lack* of transportation

Below is an outline of issues worth examining more closely in accordance with the above:

- a) gender-specific differences in relation to sustainable consumption

The EU houses seven per cent of the citizens of the world but accounts for 17 per cent of overall consumption. Estimates in the EU have also shown that the member states as a group leave a larger ecological footprint than the whole of Asia. In Sweden, consumption largely exceeds the EU average. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs states that the ecological footprint left by Swedish consumers – i.e. the impact that consumers have on the environment, measured in surface area (hectares) – is 7.0 ha, compared with the European average of 4.9 ha.²⁶

The 75 per cent rise in Sweden's GDP since 1975 has led to substantial growth in consumption during this period, and many Swedes have been in a position to consume an ever-larger number of goods and services over and above their basic needs. As a result, Swedish households have increased the amount they spend on communications, leisure, entertainments and culture, recreation, charter travel, hotels, cafés and

²⁶ Sw Gov, written communication (Skr 2005/06:107)

restaurants.²⁷ Only a small part of this consumption has been analysed from a gender perspective.

In 2000, each Swede ate an average of 800 kg of food, which is almost 40 kg more than Swedes ate ten years ago and 30 kg more than the European average. We also eat less and less staple foods and increasing amounts of soft drinks, sweets and snacks, etc – which is making the population, especially men, increasingly fat. Women are spending less and less time on preparing and cooking food, and, as before, men are spending much less time than women on the performance of such household tasks.²⁸ Instead, Swedish households are consuming increasing amounts of deep-frozen and ready-cooked food.²⁹

Also, floor space in Swedish homes is steadily increasing, and Swedes now travel 50 per cent more than 25 years ago, primarily to and from work, school and the shops, etc. Also, air travel has increased significantly over the past ten years. Women's and men's travel habits tend to differ. Men take many more business trips than women, who travel more often for service or buying purposes, use public transport more widely and are more likely to be passengers than car drivers.

In Swedish society, our opportunities and life situations are strongly influenced by our sex, as consumption is markedly gender-based. Men eat out more often than women, for instance, and also consume more alcohol and tobacco/snuff than women. Many products available in the market today have been created to suit the bodies, interests and needs of one sex or the other.³⁰ Statistics Sweden has also presented figures showing clear differences in terms of gender-specific consumption patterns.³¹

Lack of equality between the sexes finds expression in different consumption patterns, where women for instance are more likely to buy basic essentials in the form of cheaper but recurring expendables for the whole family, such as food, clothing and household articles, while men are more likely to buy expensive capital goods and to be the registered owners of things like homes, cars and home electronics. This pattern reflects the division between paid and unpaid work among households – where unpaid, 'invisible' work is still performed largely by women.³²

Studies in countries in the South show that consumption patterns in poor families differ in gender terms to a greater extent than in richer

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Report of the Long-Term Planning Commission

²⁹ Sw Gov, written communication (Skr 2005/06:107)

³⁰ Sw Gov, written communication (Skr 2005/06:107)

³¹ Statistics Sweden

³² Report of the Long-Term Planning Commission

groups, e.g. where the care and educational needs of boys and men are given priority over those of women and girls, where women and girls often eat last and least in poor families, and where women are seldom entitled to own land or other important resources.

These patterns indicate that women, even those who have jobs, including well paid jobs, still tend to have primary responsibility for the home, children and elderly relatives in families the world over – and thus may appear as main consumers of household services – but for the benefit of the *family as a whole*. Women also use public transport even in household with cars more often than men and travel short distances close to home.³³ Men generally enjoy larger economic frameworks through having (better paid) jobs and consuming more capital goods, by possessing products with a greater technological content, by using their own cars more, by visiting restaurants/bars more often and by being able to move about more freely than women, who in many countries are not allowed to visit cafés or public places, etc.

A comparison between the sexes seems to indicate that men's lifestyles and consumer patterns are more resource-intensive and less sustainable than women's, in whatever terms, whether economic, social or environmental.

a) gender-specific differences in relation to lifestyles and welfare perceptions – and the reasons for these differences

Women's and men's lifestyles are rooted in the financial means at their disposal, but also in their attitudes, in the moral and ethical positions they adopt, and in how they relate to other people, to nature and to the environment, etc. Several lifestyle-related aspects concern neither consumption nor the production of goods and services – even if consumption today plays a highly dominant role in societies all over the world.³⁴ This is particularly true when viewed in an historical perspective. For large groups, lifestyles are to a great extent defined by people's consumption of goods and services, as noted for instance in the 2004 report from the World Watch Institute (WWI), which is devoted exclusively to consumption patterns. According to the WWI, consumerism is now so prevalent throughout the world that it appears to have been the real 'winner' of the Cold War struggle between East and West.³⁵ For poor people, especially poor women, choice hardly exists at all, and choice of 'lifestyle' is to a great extent a matter of power and influence.

³³ Sw Gov, written communication (Skr 2005/06:107)

³⁴ Giddens

³⁵ World Watch Institute

In richer countries and groups, our preferences with regard to things like consumption, as noted by sociologist Anthony Giddens, are an expression of our 'self-identity', which is rooted in class, gender, age and ethnicity, etc. What we call our 'consumer choices' are seldom 'voluntary' but are shaped by the time-bound and place-bound expectations of the current era, by social and other conditions, and by factors such as economic resources, health, age and gender. So while consumption is ultimately rooted in our wish to fulfil basic human needs such as eating and sleeping, over time it has acquired an existential role of its own in that our consumption defines who we are. Consumption has become a way of expressing our group affiliation, our status and so on.³⁶

A Norwegian study by Nyberg and Stø notes the existence of a global 'consumer class' peopled not least by middle class groups the world over, and finds that it displays fairly uniform preferences and consumption patterns – as well as gender-specific differences.³⁷

Like other groups, the large middle-class section of the population is constantly influenced by advertising and popular culture providing stereotyped pictures of women and men – including the mass spread of soap operas worldwide – all of which tells us what is expected of us as 'real men' and 'real women' in the way of relationships, lifestyles and consumption. Thus are our identities 'confirmed' – and in the case of young women and men also *formed in a stereotyped manner, which conflicts with general social goals concerning the right of the individual to free choice and freedom of expression.*

In our relations with others and in the way we view ourselves we reassert our gender affiliation several times a day, every day, by means of gestures, clothing, behaviour and so forth, as noted by Anna Höglund in her dissertation on gender and war.³⁸ For men, it is often a matter of asserting one's male identity by means of power, authority and competence, etc. For women it is often a case of appearing attractive and caring, etc. As individuals, then we make our consumer choices on the basis of a fundamental need for self-affirmation and affiliation in our family lives, working lives and community roles.

To understand choices of consumption and lifestyle, we need to take note of how the male role is associated throughout the world *among other characteristics* with power and violence, something that is particularly reflected in popular culture. Such role behaviour makes men the dominant 'consumers' of public resources in the form of penal care and also of the (illegal) trade in alcohol, drugs, sex and weapons, etc. The

³⁶ Sw Gov, written communication (Skr 2005/06:107)

³⁷ Nyberg and Stø

³⁸ Höglund

female role, on the other hand, is more closely associated with health and social care provision both at home and at the workplace, and with subordination to men, all of which tends to influence women's consumer choices.

The male stereotype associated with: Women are associated with:

Family provider, family head, influence at all levels	Children, care/at home and workplace, Care of the elderly/-"- Food, running the home
Leisure time: outdoor life, sport, bars, sex, weapons, cars	Leisure time (where possible): shopping, books, culture
Expensive purchases	Shoppaholics', but rarely of expensive capital-goods that primarily men buy

It is worth noting here that our consumer choices also depend on which goods and services are produced and are available to us. Today, for instance, we have a *surplus* of goods with *little* service content, as such content has been 'structured out' in the name of greater production efficiency. On the other hand, we have a *deficit* of goods and services (e.g. health and social care) with a high service content that cannot be removed through restructuring.

b) the causes of gender-conditioned differences in terms of:
– *employment, paid and unpaid work, time-poverty and leisure time*

In seeking to analyse and understand the different circumstances, 'lifestyles' and consumption patterns of women and men, we need to learn more about what women and men *produce*, both in the home and in their professional lives – which is still a function of sex, gender and gender roles.

As the report of the Swedish Long-Term Planning Commission shows, average disposable income for women in Sweden in 2002 was less than 70 per cent of men's average income. Single mothers with children were the household category with the lowest amount of disposable income in 2004: 69 per cent of the national average. Single women have lower incomes than single men, irrespective of age. Disposable income per unit of consumption for families in which both parents were born outside the EU amounted to 78 per cent of the average.³⁹

³⁹ Sw Gov, written communication (Skr 2005/06:107)

In Sweden, according to the Government's own Long-Term Planning Commission, women risk being left to take care of elderly relatives – including those of their male partners – with the anticipated decline in public resources for care of the elderly resulting from what is termed the demographic challenge facing the country. A clear gender pattern has already emerged among 60-year-olds who retire at the age of 60: men are retiring *because* they enjoy good health and sound finances, while women are retiring because they are ill and worn out after performing poorly paid work in such sectors as health and social care – and they are doing so despite the fact that their financial situation, which is already poor, deteriorates even further when they retire.

Similar tendencies have been observed in the EU.⁴⁰

The great importance of women's unpaid work in the home is illustrated by, for instance, World Bank estimates showing that poor women in general account for about 75 per cent of all the care provided to poor people the world over – as the poor can seldom afford hospital care and are thus largely dependent on care provided by wives, mothers, mothers-in-law and other women.⁴¹

Many international studies (Sen, UNRISD, Kabeer), along with Swedish ones by Nyman, show that men do not divide their income equally within the family but consume a significant portion themselves before sharing it out.⁴² Nobel economics laureate Amartya Sen and others have pointed out that family resources are distributed on the basis of power and status, which means that women and girls receive the least amount of food, medical care and education, etc. Similarly, women as a group have the least influence on consumption and on the distribution of resources in the village or urban neighbourhood where they live, and also at the national level.⁴³

⁴⁰ Voices of the Poor

⁴¹ European Commission

⁴² UNRISD, Nyman

⁴³ Sen

Conclusions and further work

To borrow a phrase from Swedish author Theodor Kallifatides, the important thing is to understand whose story is establishing the norm. Rather than talking in general about ‘consumers’ as a homogenous group, therefore, we have to bring women into the story and keep in mind that women and men around the world live in different circumstances, due both to the differing tasks they perform in the home and at the workplace and to perceptions of male superiority and female subordination.

Based on the arguments put forward in this paper, then, we need to acquire a closer understanding of how socially constructed gender roles affect

- a) general differences between women’s and men’s consumption and production
- b) the causes of such differences, such as
 - i) ‘gender roles’, unpaid and paid work, gender-based rights and economic and social circumstances, time-poverty versus leisure time,
 - ii) perceptions and priorities regarding welfare and lifestyle,
- c) examples that illustrate socially gender-based differences in key areas such as transportation, reflecting issues on the UN’s CSD agenda such as energy usage, air pollution, climate change and access to transport, travel to the workplace, etc – linked to general questions about what is socially acceptable for women and men respectively in terms of mobility, participation and contribution to public life, and to gender-related dissimilarities in terms of income and ownership.

In future studies of unsustainable versus sustainable consumption and production, special emphasis should be attached to

- i) excessive consumption among the rich – especially rich men, as men have larger incomes and fortunes than women throughout the world and can consume whatever they wish and can afford,
- ii) the unacceptably low level of consumption among the poor – and especially poor women, which as a result of female subordination and women’s lack of resources is often so low that they have no real chance of choosing ‘lifestyles’.

Hopefully, knowledge along the lines indicated above can help inform actors better in designing *strategic* action that can improve the scope and design of activities to provide energy to poor urban women, to address the health problems of women and children who due to the current division of labour in most families are those who work in the homes of poor households and thus suffer from severe health problems due to air pollution etc.

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